

The ABCs of Bullying: Addressing, Blocking, and Curbing School Aggression

Fact Sheet: Prevention and Intervention – Administrators

What Schools/Administrators Can Do

All staff at a school should be aware of what steps are necessary to help prevent and stop bullying. As a first step, school staff should be aware of the purposes bullying may serve for the children who bully. These include:

- Attention, recognition, prestige, or acceptance in a peer group. **(Creating a climate that does not tolerate bullying removes the social power of bullies.)**
- Access to an activity or item. Some students use bullying as an excuse to get what they want (e.g., extortion, intimidation).
- A lack of understanding of social, cultural, psychological, or physical differences.

Planning For Safe Schools

A safe school is the result of careful planning and research, and a thorough understanding of the school's environment and community is critical to its success. Many schools have found it helpful to begin by creating an anti-bullying planning worksheet to make sure all avenues have been considered. This multi-system approach sends a clear and consistent message to bullies and victims alike that bullies are not in charge and that all children deserve to be safe.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program created by Dan Olweus has been identified as one of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Model Programs as well as one of 10 model violence prevention programs by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. The core elements for school-level interventions in this program include:

- Assessing school needs and goals by using an anonymous questionnaire to poll the student body on the nature and extent of bullying problems.
- Forming a bullying prevention coordinating committee.
- Providing in-service days for teachers to review findings of the questionnaire, discuss the problem, and plan the prevention efforts.
- Holding school-wide events to launch the program and incorporating anti-bullying themes and activities into the curriculum.
- Increasing supervision in areas that are known "hotspots" for bullying, including the cafeteria and playground.
- Developing school-wide rules and consistent consequences for violations against bullying.
- Developing a system to reinforce positive behaviors.
- Holding staff discussion groups to enhance understanding and motivation.
- Involving parents in school activities and making sure parents and schools are aware of available resources in the community.

The Olweus program also involves class-level interventions (e.g., class meetings about bullying) and individual-level interventions.

Anti-Bullying Policies

When trying to reduce bullying in a school, the entire school administration should agree upon and develop its own policy and procedures for dealing with discipline, which is followed by **all school staff**. In addition to implementing consistent discipline, all adults should model respectful and appropriate behavior. Procedures may include:

- Intervene immediately. Stop the bullying behavior as soon as you see it or hear about it.
- Talk to the bully and the victim separately. If more than one child is involved, talk to each of them individually, in quick succession.

- If a peer mediation program is already in place, be careful with referrals where bullying is involved because of the power imbalance between bully and victim. The target may feel additional intimidation and/or may not have the communication or assertiveness skills necessary for successful mediation.
- Consult with other school personnel to understand the wider implication of the new policies within the larger school community.
- Expect the bully to minimize or deny his or her actions. Inform all bullies of the school policy and rules, class codes, the school sanctions, and the expectations for behavior.
- Reassure the victim. He or she needs to know that measures will be taken to address the bullying behavior.
- Inform the parents immediately about the incident.
- Follow up until the situation is resolved.

For students who are the victims of bullying:

- Involve them in groups and situations to make friends and develop social skills (e.g., peer support group, new student orientation, or cooperative learning group).
- Encourage them to participate in assertiveness training.

For students who bully:

- Re-educate them as to their behavior, its impact, and resulting consequences.
- Determine what situations require sanctions, such as removing privileges, detention, etc. Some schools mandate that aggressive children must complete social skills modules designed to reduce aggression and build empathy during detention.

For students who are witnesses:

- Educate witnesses on the difference between tattling and reporting.
- Encourage witnesses to support victims rather than bullies.

References

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